

THE ESSENTIALS OF
- METHODISM -

FRANCIS J. McCONNELL

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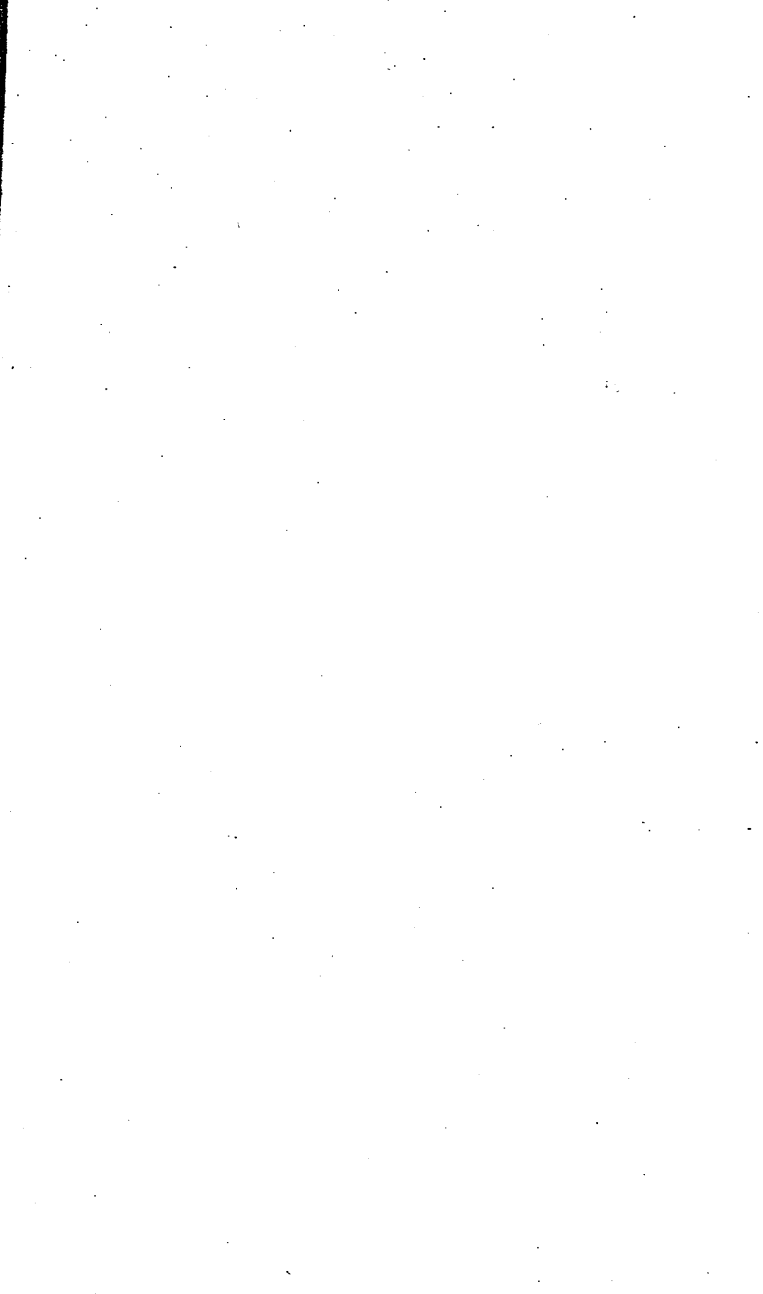
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THE ESSENTIALS OF METHODISM

BY
FRANCIS J. McCONNELL

Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church



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INTRODUCTION

IN discussing the essentials of Methodism it is well for us to remind ourselves at the outset that Methodism shares with other churches the common heritage of catholic Christianity. As an offshoot of the established Church of England Methodism has always held fast to the cardinal doctrines which have come down from the beginning of Christianity. The doctrines of God, of Christ, of the meaning and dignity of human life which prevail in Methodism are essentially the same as those of all the churches which we call evangelical. If, for example, it were proposed to try a Methodist minister for heretical views as to the Person of Christ, there would be no distinctively Methodist phrasing of the doctrine to be accepted as standard. No doubt certain Methodist authors would be quoted, but the quotations would be found to embody the doctrine which the church has held from the beginning. If a Methodist minister should be tried for disbelief in immortality, defense and prosecution would both soon discover that belief in immortality has reached no distinctive formula-

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tion at the hands of Methodism. The belief has been assumed as part of the common heritage of the Christian Church.

If we look at Methodism historically, we soon discern that all its doctrines and ceremonials and rules for practice have to do with their effect on inner spiritual experience. The Methodist movement arose as a protest against formalism in theology and ritual and practice. The early Methodists made no war on the Church of England except in the attack upon its lack of spirituality. It has been said that Methodism began when John Wesley found his heart "strangely warmed," and that the center of the power of Methodism has always been its emphasis upon inner experience. It is as if our forefathers found ready-to-hand doctrinal statements and ritualistic observances and rules of conduct which they proceeded to fill with a new life.

What is distinctive in Methodism, then, is the emphasis upon religious experience. There are not Methodist doctrines so much as Methodist accents upon commonly accepted doctrines. There is not a Methodist ritual so much as a Methodist spirit in the observance of ritual. There is not Methodist conduct so much as an inner life out of which conduct

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is supposed spontaneously to arise. In this booklet we propose to call attention to four points upon which Methodist emphasis distinctly falls. (The Methodist believes in Conversion, by which he means a passage from moral deadness to moral life which profoundly affects the whole course of the life. Historically the church has stood for a belief in Entire Sanctification, by which is meant practically the extension of spiritual influences to all parts of a man's nature. Further, the church believes in the religious training of children, holding to the doctrine that the child born in a Christian home belongs by birth to the kingdom of God, in the sense that he is entitled to and can respond to divine influences from the beginning. Finally, the Methodist, true-to-type, believes in an inner satisfaction of spiritual life which he calls Assurance, or the Witness of the Spirit. As a practical implication of this doctrine, the church has maintained from the beginning that the claims of spiritual life have the right of way in the treatment of dogmas and rituals and schemes of church organization.

Of course it will be understood that this does not mean that any Methodist who understands himself will claim that his denomination

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has a monopoly of the emphasis on the points of view just mentioned. In some form conversion and sanctification and the training of childhood and the insistence upon the primacy of the rights of intimate religious experience are given emphasis in all evangelical churches. As a matter of fact, however, the Methodist emphasis turns distinctively around these four points. These comprise the practical working creed of Methodism. It is to these essentials of Methodism, as they have force in the life of the church to-day, that we wish to call attention in the following pages.

CHAPTER I

CONVERSION

THE first essential which is distinctive of Methodism is the emphasis on conversion. Not even John Wesley himself attempted any very large theological discussion of the new birth. Wesley and all of his followers since have been confronted with the practical problem of leading men away from darkness to light. Any Methodist would say that the fundamental truth in the new birth is a man's entrance into new life through surrender to divine forces which play around and upon him. If there has been any especial theological aspect of the doctrine, it is to be found in the Methodist emphasis on the truth that the new life is a gift from God to be freely appropriated by a man himself. The invitation is, and has been, to all, and any who will may come. If a Methodist should cease to lay stress upon this fundamental fact of the possibility of a new birth, he would in so far cease to be a Methodist.

Some implications which have been drawn from the emphasis on the new birth are not Methodistic. For example, there are those

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who say that a man needs new birth because without the new birth he is in total depravity. Total depravity is not an essentially Methodist doctrine. The Methodist preachers and teachers have simply been content with the very manifest fact that apart from God men are in a state of sin, but the extent of the sin they have not considered. We put the matter thus to suggest that the Methodist motive is fundamentally practical. Men are in sin. The first concern is to get them out of sin. Again, the fact that early Methodist conversions were apt to be of a particular type has sometimes been held to imply that the Methodists believe in the genuineness of conversion only when the change of heart has been accompanied by great emotional upheaval. This, however, is to miss the essential in Methodist thought, that essential being a change of life so radical as to manifest itself in the life. It is a fact that the early Methodist revivals were scenes of great emotional stress, and the resolution to partake of the new life of the Kingdom was in multitudes of cases accompanied by marked and even violent feeling. The feeling in part came from the fact that many of the converts were changing over from a life of rather boisterous transgression. The popu-

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lar sins from which the early Methodists were saved were not subtle. The most casual acquaintance with English life in Wesley's time will reveal to us the sharpness of the transition from the ordinary conduct of the time to the conduct of the converted man. One who suddenly becomes alive to the grossness of intemperance, for example, or of brawling or fighting, is apt to experience profound disturbance in the realm of moral sensibility. One who squarely turns his back upon such outbreking evil-doing is apt to experience at the outset an emotional crisis. Again, the early Methodist meetings were in themselves calculated to bring forth marked emotional response, the very size of the gatherings running into numbers almost incredible to us of to-day. The general sense of moral tragedy which came to men as they looked out upon the social conditions of the times, the marvelous oratory of the preachers, together with the lack of a highly developed critical faculty which the speakers would have had to overcome, account in some degree for the accompaniments of conversion. The multitudes to whom the early leaders spoke lived for the most part simple lives. They were working people whose long days of labor knew but little diversion. Their

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lives ran in single channels, and when an unusual excitement like the religious appeal of the Wesleyan revival swept upon them, their emotional life took on something of the character of a stream pouring out beyond its banks. Hence come such statements as that the Methodist knows the day and hour of his conversion; that the conversion is not really Methodist unless the convert cries out; that Methodist experience is "clear" when it really "gets through."

The early Methodist leaders themselves, however, kept the emphasis upon the results of conversion. The fact that a man had even lost consciousness under overwhelming religious excitement did not necessarily mean to the fathers that the man was born again. They waited to see what he would do. The fact that a man had not shown signs of religious excitement did not mean that he was still in darkness.

It is entirely fair to say, however, that the early Methodist leaders did attach great importance to feeling in religion. A religion which called forth no reaction in the realm of sensibility seemed to them to be a very questionable affair, but the feeling might run quietly in the inner depths. There is no

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record, for example, that John Wesley himself ever showed marked emotional excitement. But he had felt his heart strangely warmed. The exalted feeling of Charles Wesley showed itself in sublime bursts of song. Now there is a vast distance between feeling the heart strangely warmed, or feeling the impulse to poetic utterance, and the surrendering of oneself to the emotional storm of an immense religious gathering. We have never heard of anyone questioning the reality of the experience of John or Charles Wesley.

We repeat that the essential in the Methodist doctrine of conversion is the inner yielding of the life to the divine forces. On the theoretical side these divine forces may be very inadequately conceived of. The thought of God may not be of the highest. If we were to take our thought out from all theological expression, we would have to say that in the Methodist view conversion comes through voluntary self-surrender to the very highest thought of God that one can have, and the progress of the thinking of our time has as yet done nothing to invalidate the practical results in living which have come through such self-surrender.) Many psychological experiences which were once thought of as produced

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by a supernatural breaking into the course of nature have been reclassified in scientific thinking, but the simple fact is that obedient surrender to what is known as the will of God has led to transformed lives. In Methodist thought to-day, as in the beginning, everything turns around the resolution to follow Christ. Methodist belief is that the surrender leads to transformation of life. One can phrase the theory of how all this is done to suit oneself, but one cannot abandon the idea of passage into new life through surrender to the Divine Will without abandoning something essentially Methodist. There are Methodists who at one end of the line identify conversion with great emotional upheaval, just as there are those at the other end of the line who think of it as nothing more than signing a card in the Sunday school, or shaking hands with the minister in response to an invitation to join the church. Both views miss the point. Upheavals may indeed accompany self-surrender, and self-surrender may be marked by joining a church, but the center of the new birth is a surrender of the will in response to which the new influences, which we think of as divine, begin to lift the life toward higher levels.)

CHAPTER II

ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION

A SECOND Methodist essential is the emphasis on entire sanctification. In approaching such a theme we may as well try to clear ourselves of prejudice and to discover what the early Methodists had in mind by this doctrine, and what truth there is in that doctrine for to-day.

Methodist thinking was at the beginning phrased in terms taken from the prevailing philosophy of the day. That philosophy was deism. Like most others of his time, John Wesley assumed that nature was an order created by God in the beginning but at present operating under laws largely self-executive. God showed himself in relation to nature through miracle. Human nature as well as physical nature stood largely apart from God except as God revealed himself to man by miraculous intervention. Conversion was itself an intervention. After conversion it was possible for the believer to receive a further miraculous work of grace which would cleanse

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the entire nature of its tendencies to evil. This doctrine of entire sanctification, like that of conversion, was fitted rather loosely into the current philosophy of the time. It is said that Samuel Johnson used to complain of John Wesley that he never had time to sit down and talk anything through. He was always in a hurry to get on to some practical task which must be met and handled. This was certainly true of Wesley so far as his philosophy was concerned. In his exposition of doctrines he very often left things at loose ends.

John Wesley and the others around him seemed to teach that the cleansing work of grace which results in entire sanctification can be accomplished in a single spiritual crisis. The fact with which they were dealing was that crises do occur in the lives of believers which on the instant work very great advance. No folly would be more complete than that which would go through Methodist history and strike out as unreal the experiences which our fathers called the blessing of entire sanctification. The psychological study of our day has shown us that spiritual progress is very apt to proceed under a certain law of rhythm. Spiritual advance is not like the ascent of a stairway. It is like a growth in an

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organism in which periods of long preparation are succeeded by quick flowerings. Or, it is like those bodily processes which come to a focus, or to what we call a turning point. In Wesley's day the stress placed on spiritual exercises made for both the preparation of the crisis and for the crisis itself. A man upon whose thought profound religious impressions were constantly being made would find himself, under the instruction of a teacher or through the inspiration of a vast multitude, suddenly coming to a deeper understanding of God, brought to a keen awareness of the presence of the Divine, or to a quick casting off of habits and tendencies which were hindering his development. There can be no doubt about the genuineness of experiences of this sort. The doubt comes as to the interpretation. The interpretations were often artificial and unnatural—artificial, in that they were fitted to a doctrine rather than to life itself, and unnatural in that the same person who had experienced many a sharp crisis in his inner life might pick out one such crisis as giving the blessing of sanctification. He might ignore the significance of further crises. The writer of these pages was once thrown into the company of a number of persons who

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were genuinely seeking for the highest and best in Christian experience. One of the company received a very wholesome uplift at a critical moment in his life, an uplift which he called entire sanctification. As months of thoroughly consecrated living went by he encountered another spiritual crisis even more illuminating than its predecessor. Then the good man was sorely puzzled. He had called the earlier experience entire sanctification. What should he call the next? His doctrine would not allow him to believe that the earlier experience was incomplete. Just how to fit the later crisis into his life perplexed him sadly. The fact was that this particular man, while of marked religious talent, of a somewhat mystical kind, was normally and naturally passing through experiences which have been common to the higher religious spirits of all ages. So early Methodism, keenly alive as a spiritual force, led naturally to the quickening of men through the successive rhythms of Christian experience, but many times left them with a doctrine which they found it difficult to fit to their lives.

Early Methodists too made use of a distinction which was fraught with moral peril. They used to say that the sanctified man was

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pure as to his intent, but possibly faulty as to his judgment. Of course we all see a measure of force in this distinction, but in the realms of the higher religious theory the distinction is a dangerous instrument. We are becoming increasingly aware of the fact that a human life is a human life, one and indivisible. It is not as easy to draw lines between conscience and judgment as our fathers thought. The use of the distinction led to a double disadvantage. On the one hand it became easy for the believers to excuse themselves on the ground that they meant well, and on the other it prompted the hard-headed outsider to scoff at harmful deeds which came out of a professedly sanctified life. Further, the doctrine was in danger of encouraging spiritual lawlessness. If all a man's impulses are holy, he is, of course, divinely authorized to act out any impulse which comes to him. Unless a doctrine like that of entire sanctification is in the hands of very wise, cool-headed leaders, it can open the doors to all sorts of wildness. Careful students of John Wesley's life have insisted that he never claimed the blessing of entire sanctification for himself, and Charles Wesley confessed himself increasingly perplexed at the contradiction

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which he saw between profession and practice in the lives of many believers.

Still, with all the defects of the doctrine we must insist that it is essential to Methodism to keep alive the ideal at which it aims; that is, the bringing of 'all parts of the life under subjection to the law of the Kingdom. In the emphasis upon the doctrine not enough stress has been laid upon the will to act up to the full light, as the light is revealed. A good working definition of entire sanctification is that of an old saint, that entire sanctification consists in a purpose to sanctify everything one can get one's hands on. It will not do to allow this ideal to drop from Methodist thinking. Whether progress in the individual life comes through sharply marked crises, or whether it is a gradual unfolding which cannot mark times and places, the truth is that the essential duty of progress must always be kept before the mind of the Christian. As well teach that the mere fact of enlistment in an army makes a man in a full sense a soldier, as to teach that mere enlistment in a church makes a man a full citizen of the Kingdom.

While we are speaking, however, of the higher life we may as well remind ourselves that the higher life must show itself in meet-

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ing the higher tests. If a man professes an experience of perfect love, we can hardly expect him to become uglier as the days go by. An "entirely sanctified" man must not ask us to accept his testimony as to his own state of grace if his tongue becomes increasingly censorious. It is always highly suspicious also when the confirmedly stingy talk about the higher life. In short, the claim of a modest saint that he felt himself consecrated to the Lord up to the limits of his self-knowledge is about as far as a careful believer would think of going in the way of personal testimony. For all branches of Christian experience the Master's test is the final one—"By their fruits ye shall know them." The people who have to eat the fruit may be better judges of the quality of the experience than the people that bear the fruit. But the Christian's aim cannot be at anything short of perfection. It will not do for us to say that we cannot be perfect. We must strive after perfection. The Methodist ideal does not differ from the New Testament ideal, that we are to be perfect, even as the Father in heaven is perfect. But the test of perfection in the Sermon on the Mount is of a moral steadiness which makes the sun shine upon the evil and

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the good, and the rain to fall upon the just and the unjust. If men are tempted to think themselves already perfect, it might be well for them to ask themselves how safe it would be to intrust the sunshine or the rainfall in their hands.

This system of social consequences leads out to certain very practical implications of the Methodist doctrine of sanctification. We have come to see to-day that a man shows himself by what he does, that he is in a sense where he acts, and that he is in the relations that obtain between him and his followers. The spirit of the kingdom of God consists in our bringing more and more of our activities and relationships under the law of Christ. This leads us to the significance of Methodism for the social contacts of men. We shall reserve this theme for a later chapter.

CHAPTER III

CHILDHOOD RELIGION

METHODISM, taking its start from an emphasis on the need of conversion, is borne on by an inner spiritual logic. The early leaders felt that no limit must be placed upon the extent to which the kingdom of God could extend in the conquest of all parts of a man's nature. The leaders soon saw that before the work of grace could reach the ideal in the human life it must start with the life at the earliest possible moment. Hence they early came to an emphasis on childhood religion. It will be seen that the three essentials which we have thus far mentioned belong together by a kind of logical consistency. Conversion leads on to the ideal of entire sanctification, and entire sanctification suggests the need of holding fast the soul to the Kingdom from earliest childhood.

Here again we must distinguish between the essential aim of a doctrine and the manner in which the doctrine is put into practice. John Wesley himself seems to have known

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little about the true methods for making religion attractive to childhood. The age itself was rather gloomy and somber, so that the brightness which should mark childhood piety was missing. The accounts of childhood experiences which come down to us from early Methodist days are rather disheartening. The aim seemed to be to put mature experiences upon the lives of children, and the result was not much more edifying than is usually the case with such experiments. John Wesley once tried to run a school for boys on the plan that the youngsters should rise at five o'clock in the morning, and that all play should be forbidden. We of this later day record with considerable satisfaction that the school failed.

But all this error in practice must be put to one side before the evident truth that the Methodists were fundamentally on the right track. The age itself did not make much provision for normal childhood experiences, so that we must not blame the Methodists too severely if they made blunders in child training. We must remember that the converts of Methodists came chiefly from the laboring classes. Wages were low. Parents sent their children out to work at very tender

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years. The crudeness of their approach to the child problem was a part of the general ignorance of the age concerning the child. Over against the crudeness was the persevering attempt of Methodism to meet the religious needs of childhood by doctrinal statement and by church procedure.

All of Methodism's doctrinal phrasings have come out of the stress of practical emergencies. The Methodist aimed at developing the highest types of religious experience. To do this they must start with children. Their first need was a statement which would enable them to meet the charge that the child is by nature depraved. The doctrine of total depravity, as we have before indicated, has never been taken by Methodists with any especial seriousness; but there are enough tendencies toward evil in the life of the ordinary child to make the religious handling of the child an affair of serious importance. To meet the doctrinal difficulties of the situation the Methodists spoke of "prevenient grace," by which they meant that even if the child came into the world with tendencies toward evil, the Spirit of God was round about the child from the beginning to aid in keeping him from the evil. This phrase, "prevenient

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grace," must be understood in its purpose rather than in its exact theological implications. The Methodists were confronted by facts. Evil lives could be made good. To make the lives good it was necessary to start as early as possible. In this saving work the Spirit of God would help. This practical statement gave the early Methodists all the theological foundation they needed for dealing with the child problem.)

As to church practice, it was early determined that the children in Methodist homes should be looked upon as in a peculiar sense the objects of divine care. Of course this care was mediated through the activities of parents, and the parents often made blunders. But the disciplinary provision that baptized children in Methodist homes should be enrolled in a "pastor's list," and at any time, when it seems wise, be received into full communion with the church without joining on probation, is a distinctly Methodist procedure. That this provision is susceptible of abuse no one can deny. If our fathers made the mistake of trying to fit adult experiences upon the lives of children, many modern Methodists make the mistake of paying no attention to childhood experience whatever beyond a

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mere formal enrollment in a church. But those persons to-day who are really striving to bring children through the normal childhood, with a normal religious experience, are working distinctly in line with the spirit of essential Methodism. The general thought of the times to-day makes provision for childhood such as has never before been known. As a single example, schools and communities insist as never before upon the significance of play. While it may not be true that the last twenty-five years have really discovered the child, it is true that so recent a period has discovered the moral significance of play. It is true also that modern psychological study has vastly cleared up our understanding of the child nature. We see pretty clearly the steps through which child development passes. We study the type of religious truth which is likely to be most successful with each period. We recognize also as never before the part of individuality in the child's life and we seek to conserve that individuality against the leveling tendencies of educational and industrial and social processes. Now, in all these things we differ from our fathers. Much so-called child depravity of the olden days was nothing but a desire to play, or it was harmless mis-

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chief. Much childish perversity was not in the child so much as in the older person who perversely sought to force a child into an unnatural channel; or the tendency to evil in the child was nothing more than the expression of originality. Still, when all is said, we must remember, to the credit of the Methodists, that they faced the child problem and tried to solve it. Their actual methods of solution have only negative value. Their ideal and fundamental aim are of immense consequence; and in spite of all that we have said about the mistakenness of their method of procedure, we must not forget the grave peril that confronts the Methodism of to-day in the willingness of so many Methodist parents to make nothing of the moral and spiritual problem of childhood, or to turn that problem over to solution by agencies outside the home. If it is easy to take the responsibilities toward children too seriously, it is easier still not to take them seriously enough. The way the modern Methodist can show his spirit of seriousness is by patient search for all the light possible on the problem of childhood, and by most earnest attempt to make religion for children sensible and joyous.

But where, it may be asked, does all this fit

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into the Methodist doctrine of conversion? Is not the child in need of conversion? The answer to this question is really not very difficult. We must remember that conversion is a word of our own making. The Master's term is new birth. In a spiritual sense a growing life is progressively born into higher and higher kingdoms. When a child begins to take an interest in the realm of books it is permissible for us to say that he is, in a sense, born into a new kingdom. There are kingdoms of learning and of patriotism and of art. Lives reach these kingdoms as they respond to the influences which point them toward the kingdoms. No man can become a citizen of the kingdom of science or of art without surrendering to the influences which bear him toward that kingdom. Just so, there is a kingdom of spiritual understanding. A child born in a Christian home might conceivably never know transgression, and yet be in need of ratifying for himself the rule of life which he had received from his parents. It is hard to read the Gospel of Luke without feeling that the experience of the boy Jesus in the temple marked a sharp crisis in his life. There ought to come a time in the life of every child when he makes a decision, or takes

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a stand in ratification of the truth which he has been taught. In all this the largest liberty should be left for individual expression. This whole realm requires the utmost wisdom on the part of pastors and teachers, but it is a mistake to assume that Christian nurture does away with the possibility of beneficial crisis in the life of the child, or that it is not necessary for children, nurtured by Christian leaders, themselves to take a stand for the truth which they have been taught. Part of our confusion as to the doctrine of conversion comes of a false conception of the supernatural. If God is supposed to work merely, or chiefly, in startling or spectacular terms of experience, we shall, of course, have as our standard conversion one which few children can ever be expected to meet. If, on the other hand, the divine force has seemed to work through the guidance of parents and the counsels of teachers, and the orderly unfolding of the child's own nature, and in the blossoming and flourishing periods which mark successive stages of development, we shall find the new birth, by which we mean a birth through self-surrender into a realm of spiritual insight and devotion, within the reach of all children.

CHAPTER IV

THE WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT

THE fourth cardinal emphasis in Methodism can be phrased in the time-honored expression "witness of the Spirit," by which is meant that the final witness to the presence of God is in the heart of the individual man himself. We must not be surprised to find this emphasis also uttered with many crude accents. We have seen that Methodist thinking was shaped by the general thought conditions of the latter part of the eighteenth century. Any theory which could be conceived of as natural was ordinarily supposed to move along of itself. Any theory which seemed like a violent interruption of the course of nature was regarded as coming from the Divine, so that it was altogether in harmony with the general intellectual situation of the time for the Methodist to pick out the more unusual spiritual phenomena as signs of the presence of God in his life. We repeat again that it would be the utmost folly to question the reality of the unusual experiences in them-

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selves, or to seek to minimize their importance. Too much came out of such experiences for us to attempt to belittle them. We can see, however, that the stress on the unusual experience was likely to lead to a one-sided emphasis. The early fathers were prone to pick out a single instance of ecstatic uplift as the chief work of the Divine in their lives. If asked whether they belonged to the kingdom of Christ or not, they were very apt to reply in terms of this outstanding experience.

While early Methodist literature abounds in accounts of altogether remarkable spiritual illuminations of individuals, we must not forget that many believers just as devout as their brethren sought for such unusual experiences and did not obtain them, and yet nevertheless gave their lives consistently to Christian service. In the fuller knowledge of our time we have come to recognize that unusual spiritual crises may depend upon some determining factors which are also unusual. A man may have an unusual gift of spiritual sensibility, or he may have led an unusual life, or he may have been thrown under the strain of unusual excitement. These unusual factors of temperament and circumstance account for much of the unusual in religious experience. If we

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seek for the heart of the Methodist viewpoint as to the work of the Spirit, it really means the assurance that comes into men's lives as they do the will of God, that they are working together with God. Methodism is a democratic movement; for her any statement of the relation between the human and the divine must be such as to make the saving relation possible to all men. Whether the Methodist was born again in the excitement of a great public service, or in the privacy of his own home, the emphasis of the early leader was always on his duty to do the will of God. Emotional experiences were discounted except as they led to the doing of the divine will. The surrender of the will was, indeed, very often regarded as a violent breaking loose from sin; but in the Christian life the stress was upon obedience to the will of God. Without overmuch theological refinement the Methodists believed that this power to do the will of God was itself a sign of the presence of God in the human life. The first true mark of the presence of God in the human life was willingness to surrender to the divine will. In a sense we might say that the work of the Spirit of God in the human life reveals itself in the work of a

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man's own spirit. The very fact that a man's will is responding to the will of God is an indication that the divine will is at work upon the human will. In the next place, the strength of the Methodist position is in its teaching that the service of God involves the sensibility. Barring all abnormalities of human life, it is to be expected that the service of God will bring resulting satisfaction in the realm of feeling. It would be a strange phenomenon if an earnest student never felt anything of the thrill of learning, or if a devotee of art never felt any stirrings of enthusiasm for the artistic, or if the servant of a country never experienced anything of patriotic glow. The place of feeling in Methodist experience has often been unfairly caricatured. Early Methodists were often cartooned as persons who demanded of one another as to just the precise state of their souls at a particular instant. A German theological professor once ridiculed the Methodists as holding pistols at the heads of converts demanding on pain of instant destruction an answer as to their exact spiritual condition. All this is woeful misunderstanding. What the Methodists really stood for was the belief that there is emotional satisfaction in doing

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the will of God. In a time of terrible gloom they raised their songs and shouts against the weight of despondency. In a movement dealing with scores and hundreds of persons we have to take account of the normal and usual phenomena rather than the abnormal; and the normal emphasis of the early Methodists was on the fact that the doing of the will of God would bring its own self-evidencing satisfactions. They did not believe that a man could be living in full spiritual health without being aware of the fact. They did not blind their eyes to the rhythm of religious feeling, to that ebb and flow of sensibility which is so characteristic of human nature. They certainly did not insist that the believers should at all times possess the same quality and fullness of emotional stir, but they did believe that the religious life brings its own inner glow. If in Charles Wesley the spirit of Methodism broke forth into rapturous song, in John Wesley it settled into the depths of an abiding sureness of conviction which sustained him in the midst of appallingly abundant labors.

While we are dealing with anything so subtle as emotion it is hard to draw exact lines of distinction. In a general way, how-

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ever, putting to one side the excesses of emotion in individual persons and the mistaken interpretations of religious feeling characteristic of some early Methodist teaching, the worth of the teaching as to the place of emotionalism in human life abides for all time. John Wesley and his coworkers looked out upon a society that was trying to find some sort of emotional excitement in the midst of heavy and monotonous burden-bearing. The oft-quoted legend in front of the English public house in Wesley's time to the effect that a man could get drunk for a penny, dead drunk for two pence, and have straw to lie on for three pence, revealed not merely the bestiality of the masses but also the desperate craving for something of stir of feeling that would break in upon the deadly heaviness of the daily existence. Over against the lower physical forces of excitement Wesley placed the emotional reactions of the service of the kingdom of God. If Methodism had not been an intensely emotional religion, it would not have survived the competition of carousals, brawlings, and coarse contests of brute strength long enough to get a start.

Almost all human values have their seat in the realm of the sensibility. To say that men

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are thinking machines is to jest, and to say that they are simply centers of will activity is to miss the mark. We all agree that men seek happiness, and happiness has to do with feeling. The times have changed since Wesley's day. Industrial progress, though it has come but a short distance, has come far enough to lift off the backs of men such burdens as they bore in Wesley's day. Hours have been shortened, some of the heavier weights shifted from men to machines, the laws of sanitation and of public health have become better known. But men live just as truly in the realm of sensibility as ever. What men crave is something which brings emotional satisfaction. Satisfaction has no meaning apart from sensibility. If an observer were to read the popular books of to-day, he would quickly discover that men are not seeking mere information or giving themselves over to abstract thought. To take a single instance from current experience, we may remark that the popularity of the picture show is its emotional appeal; and, for that matter, the pictures that will make the spectators weep are much more popular than the ones that will make them laugh. We may well pray that Methodism be speedily delivered from the

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type of leader who deliberately strives after emotional effect, from the man who capitalizes his personal sorrows for homiletic purposes, or who judges effectiveness of preaching by visible or audible responses. But we may likewise pray to be delivered from the leadership of the man who does not see that about all that is significant in life is colored with feeling. William James used to say that our thoughts and deeds are steeped in the juices of the emotions. It is no doubt true that an emotion that comes from nowhere and leads nowhere is of scant value, but a devotion which comes of an idea and leads on to a deed is abundantly worth while. With most liberal allowance for aberrations and excesses, the Methodist emotionalism of our fathers came out of the great ideas which lie at the heart of the Christian system; and that emotionalism led on to mighty personal and social transformations which have already in marked degree influenced the life of the world as a whole.

We have indicated the spiritual fundamentals which are the real essentials of Methodism. So insistent is Methodism upon these

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essentials that she has from the beginning given them the right of way. Her aim has been to bring men out of darkness into light, to carry as far as possible the work of grace in their hearts, to hold fast the children to the Kingdom without their falling away into serious transgressions, and to make the believer inwardly conscious of citizenship in the kingdom of God. Methodism judges all doctrines and practices by their fitness to produce these spiritual consequences. In a very vital sense Methodism looks upon everything except human experience itself as instrumental to experience. Doctrines, organizations, rules of conduct are but means of grace; that is, tools for the furtherance of the Christian life. There is nothing sacred in the eyes of the church except the religious experience of the members, and this experience has right of way over all other considerations whatsoever.

CHAPTER V

METHODISM AND INTELLECTUAL PROBLEMS

WE have already seen that so far as doctrine is concerned there are no specifically Methodist doctrines, but, rather, Methodist accents upon doctrines which are common to evangelical Christianity. The Methodist Church shares the evangelical belief concerning God, Christ, and the meaning and dignity of human life. The aim of the church has been practical rather than speculative.

This emphasis upon the practical rather than the speculative has sometimes led to the charge that the Methodist Church has made no extensive intellectual contributions to Christianity. Very reputable scholars have insisted that on the intellectual side it is difficult to point to any outstanding Methodist achievements. We do not intend to waste time in the effort to cite names as disproof of this charge. Very likely those who make the charge would reply with insistence that the names we might mention are not those of

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minds of the first order. It will be remembered that Matthew Arnold once declared that the intellectual life of America was very low, and he instanced as proof the large number of Methodists in the country, declaring that with so many persons following a leader like John Wesley the intellectual outcome could not be of high value, for, according to Matthew Arnold, John Wesley's mind was of the third order. It would, of course, be utterly useless to try to meet arguments like this; but even if we should concede that the direct contributions of Methodism to the intellectual statement and defense of Christianity have not been large, we would not in that concession have surrendered the determining point. The total effect of the Methodist movement upon the mind of our country and others must be considered. There can, of course, be no question of the faithfulness of Methodism in preaching the gospel of education. In the early days she planted schools in the United States, proving herself a pioneer in the field of educational conquest, as well as in the field of evangelistic endeavor. It will not do to minimize Methodist achievements because of the fact that many of these schools have been

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outdated by educational progress and overshadowed by big institutions of private or state endowment. In the days when educational movements needed fostering and nourishing care the Methodist Church was not lacking.

But we can find a more adequate defense than this. In making for the evangelization of men Methodism has supplied the spirit and life without which theological effort would have little data to work upon. Of course, there is no conceivable method of stating this contention in statistical terms, but we cannot doubt that the Methodist ferment has furnished a large part of that immediate religious experience which so many thinkers to-day are finding a path to religious truth. Take, for example, a book like William James's *Varieties of Religious Experience*. It is well known that the method of Professor James was to move directly away from theological speculation and to consider religious phenomena in themselves. In his estimate of the revealing value of such phenomena, Professor James wrote to a distinguished Methodist theologian that he was more of a Methodist than this Methodist theologian himself. The early Methodist preachers especially would have

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replied to those who charged them with indifference to theology that they were too busy saving souls to discuss the theoretical aspects of salvation. To be sure, such a reply would have been mistaken, for salvation includes the ministry to the intellectual interests as well as to those of more immediate and practical experience. But when all is said the Methodist Church has really been true to herself in keeping the emphasis on the practical rather than on the speculative.

The question as to the relation of Methodism to intellectual interests becomes, however, vitally significant when the Methodist is confronted by the thought movements of these later times. (So far as the question of heresy is concerned the only way to convict a Methodist would be to appeal to the great catholic standards of all time. If a new statement of a truth is not offensive to genuine Christian orthodoxy, there is no reason why it should be offensive to Methodist thought. But, as we have seen, the question of Methodism is distinctively spiritual and practical, that question being, "How far can the new conception be made to minister to spiritual upbuilding? What is there in the new doctrine that will aid in conversion and sanctification and the

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religious culture of childhood, and the deeper assurance of believers?" If it should ever seem necessary for the members of an Annual Conference to call one of their fellow members to account for supposed heretical teaching—and this has almost never been done—the distinctive Methodist procedure would be to ask the supposed offender what effect his teaching was calculated to have upon the mind of believers. Apart from clear denials of manifestly fundamental truth, a Methodist could hardly be charged with heresy if he were so handling a statement of truth as to bring about an evangelistic result.

The two intellectual currents which have given the most uneasiness to churchmen of our time have been the enlarged view of the world when looked upon from the scientific standpoint, and the historical methods of biblical study. Suppose, now, a Methodist were called to account for belief in the doctrine of evolution. If the Methodist, in his statement, clearly revealed that he conceived of the universe in materialistic terms, thinking of impersonal force as working out in time and through space a universe without spiritual value, of course there would be no place for him in any evangelical church. If, on the other

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hand, it should appear that he was thinking simply of evolution as God's method of doing, it would be hard to see how any serious question could be raised against him. With this later view the practical Methodist would be likely to ask, "What difference does the conception make?" If the student could so hold the belief as to make it a source of strength to himself and to his people, his brethren might well rejoice with him that he had found an instrument so helpful in preaching and teaching. In matters of belief that do not concern fundamentals the Methodist procedure from the beginning has been to live and let live, with the emphasis always upon the effects in terms of living.

So also with the matter of historical investigation of the Scriptures. To the fundamentals concerning God, and Christ, and man, which come to us through the Scriptures, the Methodist Church is committed, as is also every other evangelical church. But the method of the revelation in the Scriptures is another problem. The Methodist Church never has been committed to such a doctrine of "the Word" as to forbid examination into the times and places and speakers and accents in which and through which the Word has been uttered.

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It will be remembered that John Wesley himself in his notes on the New Testament spoke rather freely of the lists of the ancestors of Christ as given in Matthew and Luke. Wesley says that the writers simply took these lists as they found them—a statement which of itself would quickly carry us to some sort of documentary hypothesis. The truth is that Wesley, like Luther before him, used the Scriptures with a life purpose. He sought to make the most out of them for life. And this practical consideration is still supreme in the aim of the genuine Methodist. He will seek for such a conception of the Scriptures as will best fit them into the demands of total experience. Of course there are in the nature of the case limits to such procedure; but if the Methodist preacher really aims at making men like Christ, he will aim at such view of the Scripture as seems most fitted to bring about a Christlike result. There are among Methodists all sorts of views as to the method of scriptural revelation. The man who is in spirit most genuinely Methodistic is sure to keep away from the “letter that killeth” in his search for the spirit “that giveth life.”

CHAPTER VI

METHODISM AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS

It is the veriest historical commonplace to assert that the Wesleyan revival in England started streams of social improvement in every direction. A good deal has been made of the fact that the aims of early Methodists were not primarily toward social regeneration. They preached repentance and conversion for the individual, and other benefits came as a matter of course. It seems to us that the early Methodist concentration on individual salvation as such has been overemphasized. The early leaders were not indifferent to the social consequences which would follow their preaching. They did not say that they were to preach the gospel to the individual and to allow the social consequences to take care of themselves. It is no doubt true that the correct tactical procedure in salvation of the world is to lay stress on personal conversion, but there is nothing to indicate that the early leaders were not deeply concerned with the political and industrial and social evils of

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the time. John Wesley is on record, for example, as having said that slavery was the sum of all villainies. The general rules for Methodists have quite as much to do with social conduct as with individual spiritual exercises. It seems to have been the desperate moral degradation of the times that first roused the early leaders to call on men to repent.

Even if the early Methodists were not thinking directly of the working out of spiritual influences into social expression, that is no reason why we of to-day should not ponder carefully and scientifically on the social results of preaching the gospel. Our day is deliberately seeking for efficiency in the various methods for the spread of the kingdom of God. It is clearly discernible to any student of society that the salvation of individual men will lead to large social consequences. Instead of preaching salvation and allowing the consequences to take care of themselves, it would seem on all accounts better to see if we cannot trace more accurately the relation between individual salvation and its social expression, and the relation also between the spiritual impulse and its wise application to the actual situation of to-day. It will be remembered that we have spoken of entire sanctification as

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one of the Methodist essentials. If we are to continue to preach such an ideal it may be well for us to remind ourselves that entire sanctification can mean very little apart from the social expression of religion. It is utterly impossible to draw a line between what a man is in himself, and what he is in relation to his fellows in society. So far as a man's personal intent is concerned, it may well be that a man is entirely consecrated to the Kingdom so far as he understands himself, but his consecration will show itself in the purpose to bring more and more of his acts under the law of the Kingdom. Religion has its deepest seat in the settled purpose to do right. A man can hardly make any start toward doing right without giving his purpose some sort of social application. Any clear thinking brings us to know that in the deep sense a man is where he acts. In that sense we are all profoundly "in society." In our relation to our fellows we live and move and have a large part of our being. The relation to God must show itself in our relation to our fellows. The sanctified man must aim always at bringing all his deeds under the law of good will.

—There seems to be very good Methodist warrant, then, for considering the social sphere

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as a field for genuine evangelism, and the progress of our time itself is thrusting this question more and more insistently upon our thought. Practically everywhere that Methodism reaches movements are on foot toward larger social control. Any reader of most elementary psychological discussion knows that as men come together in larger and larger groups the very fact of their coming together gives an opportunity for the unfolding of powers in the individual that would not otherwise arise. The contact of one other man stimulates an individual to the manifestation of forces he might never discover if left to himself. Contact with one thousand other men, or one million other men, or a hundred million other men ought progressively to unlock powers in each one of the individuals of the multitude. In the sphere of social psychology two and two make not four, but possibly five, or even ten. Inasmuch as the tendency of the time is toward this increased interlacing of individuals into vaster and vaster social organic life, any religious belief worthy of the name must ask itself as to its responsibility toward the social advance. In a general way religious responsibility here is apparent. If Christianity brings no message for men as they

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relate themselves to these social tendencies, social friction and conflagration must inevitably result.

And now some extreme individualist will say to us that any preaching which begins to speak of social aspects of religion will quickly get the emphasis off the center, talking about the effect of environment and of social conditions. Then we shall be reminded that it is our duty to preach that men are superior to environment, and that they must fashion the environment instead of being fashioned by it. The truth of this we willingly accept, but this conventional, hackneyed phrasing leaves a good deal unsaid. The truth is that men are fashioners of environment for other men. If I build a tenement house which in the nature of the case cannot be anything but a breeding place for tuberculosis for the tenants of the house, I am the determining factor in the environment of the tenants. If I force people to live or work under such circumstances that their moral degradation becomes easy, I am a potent evil in the environment of those who fall. It is indeed the business of the preacher to tell such unfortunates that they are to be superior to their environment, but it is the business of some prophet also to

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tell me to make a better environment. Social institutions are mere instruments to be used for the welfare of man. They are really intended to make the struggle for life more successful, and what life can leave out the moral element? It is sometimes said that those aiming at the improvement of social conditions would, if they had their way, abolish all those obstacles, the struggle against which makes strong character. It is hard to believe that this objection is urged seriously. It is about on a par with the complaint of the liquor dealer that the abolition of the saloon thwarts moral progress by taking away an obstacle against which men must struggle if they are to attain to real moral self-control. In so far as such objections are sincere—objections, for example, that the removal of poverty would be a moral curse—the objections rest upon a misunderstanding of the ideal for human life. Certain beneficent moral effects do come out of the struggle against poverty in particular instances, but the great mass of human poverty can only in its tendency be called materializing and brutalizing. The ideal is that in the human struggle man shall have a chance, and the fact is that as society is at present constituted multi-

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tudes of men do not get their chance. Methodism ought to stand for such a doctrine of humanity as will give humanity the right of way. In fact, conversion and sanctification are hardly given elementary statement until they begin to comprehend the social ideal of enlarging human life.

But all this seems rather general and indefinite. Can we not come to closer quarters with the question? What message has Methodism, for example, for the modern industrial situation? When certain commercial proceedings were under investigation by the administration at Washington some years ago, workers on Wall Street said: "We are simply waiting for the rules from Washington. When the rules come we shall play the game according to the rules." Suppose we start from this expression of industrial life as a game. We may say, then, that Methodism with its emphasis on the right-of-way of moral and spiritual life might conceivably have three distinct messages concerning the game. The first would be that the righteous man, if he is to go into the industrial game, must play it according to the rules. There must be no fouling and no sneaking. This is a message which will be needed under any

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industrial situation. There can be no system devised which will make crookedness impossible. The appeal must always be to a down-right honesty which will tolerate no personal wickedness in industrial relationship. Second, in the industrial game the rules may at any time need modification. They can be modified only through the work of a righteous public sentiment. Certain individuals may be doing the best they can under a set of industrial rules which are faulty. It may be that they can honestly say that they are not to blame, but that the error is with the system. The system can be changed only as men work together. Methodism must have a message for this growth in social sentiment which will modify the game. If we wish to push this rather unworthy figure of speech a little farther, we may say that the situation in the industrial world is somewhat like the situation in the football world. The college youth knows that the determining factor in doing away with the brutality of the old-time scrimmage was the public demand for a more open game. The public got tired of seeing fine youths in colleges get their necks broken, and the spectators also desired to see what was going on. We are in somewhat the same

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plight as we watch the industrial game, for many necks are broken and we cannot see clearly what is going on. In the third place, a more fundamental question is arising: Ought not some phases of the game to be abolished? As long as men live together they must live in industrial relationships. But does that mean, for example, that competition at least in its extreme form shall never give place to cooperation? It will be understood that the writer of this booklet holds no brief for any particular social scheme. If the gospel means anything, however, it means brotherhood; and what does brotherhood amount to without brotherliness? To put the matter in another way, can the profit-seeking ideal never give way to the ideal of service? One thing is fairly clear: if the profit-seeker does not connect the search for profits with his aim to serve, the sphere of his profit-finding will be progressively reduced. The attack all over the world to-day is on the holders of incomes derived from rent, interest, and profit. A Methodism which understands itself and the times in which it lives will preach more and more insistently that there is no spiritual justification for any industrial ideal except that which looks upon

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income as constituting an opportunity and instrument for service. The writer would exceedingly deplore the inauguration of any social regime which would take from men their own voluntary initiative in the service, but unless men in large numbers do get the whole thought of wealth down upon a service basis, there is simply no telling what may not happen. Here, again, that type of religion which lays stress upon the spiritual ideals for human lives is the only factor that can save us.

Are there any special dangers which confront Methodism herself as she looks out upon the social tendencies of to-day? Only those which come as the church herself advances to increasing wealth. The Methodist Church is not a church of the richer classes. An examination of the lists of delegates to recent General Conferences will show that the most of delegates have come from what we speak of as the middle class—a large number of them with rural or smalltown antecedents. If the writer were called upon suddenly to name ten millionaires in the Methodist Church he would be quite seriously “put to” to furnish such a list. At the instant of writing he cannot think of one half that number.

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It may be that there are many times ten millionaires in the church, but if so, the influence is not potent enough to have made any considerable impression upon the memory of one who has been an interested observer of the church for over thirty years. Of course a certain type of social radical will say that practically all General Conference delegates drawn from Methodist conditions have the capitalistic mind—that the capitalistic ideal is theirs, etc. We do not profess such oracular certainty in diagnosing the states of mind of thousands of persons as these critics assume to possess.

But there is a danger before the church. That danger lies in the accumulation of great funds for the carrying on of religious enterprises. Our colleges, for example, have increased mightily in wealth in the past ten years, and some of our business interests use sums of money reaching into the hundreds of thousands per year. We feel confident that the church will more and more strenuously insist that endowment funds and capital used in church business shall be handled in accord with the demands of the highest type of social conscience. The use of endowment funds especially ought to be so open to the

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public that anyone who chooses to know may understand whence every cent of such money comes, how it is invested, and the uses to which it is put. The type of worldliness which our fathers feared is not an especial peril, though we would be much better off if our legislation had never departed from John Wesley's rule to take only such diversions as can be taken in the name of the Lord Jesus. The type of worldliness which is really perilous is that which comes out of the temptation to conform too much to this present world, in the acquiescence in so-called business principles and commercial methods. Funds intrusted to a church are above all others to be used sacredly for human welfare, a use that by no means overlooks the sacredness of the share that belongs to labor, for example.

CHAPTER VII

METHODISM AND EDUCATIONAL PROBLEMS

IN educational matters the thought of Methodism has undergone a great clarification in the past few years. Methodism's innumerable schools and colleges arose in the beginning because Methodism had to educate her young people herself or leave them without intellectual training. With the great progress of educational institutions maintained by private endowment and by state grants there was for a time some uncertainty even in Methodist minds as to what the distinctive place of denominational education was to be. It is now pretty generally discerned that Methodism's function is to keep close hold on her schools of collegiate grade for the sake of making religion enter as a positive factor in the atmosphere of such institutions. We have come to see that the function of a college is to give the youths those comprehensive, generous views of life which make for soundness of world-outlook. A college education

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is supposed to deal not with the technical approach to this or that vocation, but with the underlying views of life and the world which condition all worthy human activities. Hence the aim is to throw around young persons in their college career the influences which make for appreciation of the religious element in human life.

So far as university training, technically speaking, is concerned, there is no reason why the church should seek to keep control. If an endowment of two millions of dollars will make it possible for a college to work indefinitely, an endowment of ten times two millions of dollars is not too great to keep alive a really efficient university, especially if large attention is given to scientific research. There is no reason why Methodism should seek to endow law, medical, or engineering schools when State and private funds can be had in so large abundance for such enterprises. But this does not mean that Methodism should neglect the student life of professional institutions. In many of our State universities there are more Methodist students than are to be found in all the distinctively Methodist institutions of the particular commonwealth. The officers of State institutions

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insist that they cannot legally offer religious instruction as such. We could have more sympathy with this statement if the same officers would declare that they could not offer irreligious instruction. Without raising an issue at this point, however, we must not refuse to see Methodism's great opportunities at the seat of State institutions. The preachers most skilled in presenting truth to inquiring minds should be sent to such centers, and all openings made by State university officials should be accepted. It is easily conceivable that students may be sent to State universities without peril in the midst of the most radically revolutionary teaching if only wise university pastors are at hand to give counsel and inspiration. Such ministerial and pastoral work is really in line with the spirit of what is best in Methodism.

In theological instruction the church is coming more and more to see that its true work is to keep the emphasis on the development of spiritual life in the midst of changing conceptions in scientific and social study. Not many years ago one of our theological schools laid down as a principle that theological students should be kept away from debated points, having their attention directed only to the

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conclusions about which there is general agreement. The result was that in after years students who had thus missed the critical points in school tried to find the paths among them by themselves and got to floundering. That same school now insists that the candidates for the ministry shall hear everything that is going on in the religious world to-day, so that they may know how to deal with the questions as they actually arise. If criticism is passed upon Methodist theological schools for liberal tendencies, let it be remembered that only those schools where radical views are faced and thought through turn out true conservatives. Of all of our schools must it be said that the atmosphere is one of genuine piety, and in such atmosphere the real theological interests are safe.

CHAPTER VIII

METHODISM AND THE MISSIONARY MOVEMENT

FROM the first Methodism has looked upon herself as having a message for all men. John Wesley spoke of the whole world as his parish. The only question which Methodism asks of men in so-called heathen lands is as to the possibility of their turning to the light, of their giving themselves whole-heartedly to the service of the Lord, of the possibility of training their children in righteousness, and of the further possibility of giving righteousness the right of way in their lives. In the more intelligent type of missionary speech pressure will be laid upon these spiritual fundamentals. Of course we all recognize the variety of arguments that can be brought forth in behalf of missionary movement—the fact, for example, that the world is so shrinking in size that the salvation of non-Christian nations is necessary for the safeguarding of the welfare of Christian nations. But the Methodist argument has always been the reli-

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gious needs of the people themselves. The Methodists have troubled themselves only with the question as to whether the non-Christian peoples could be made Christian. They have felt that the religious need is the profoundest need of man and have moved forth to satisfy the need.

With all this it must be said also that the Methodist Church has had a missionary advantage in that while it is thoroughly democratic it has not connected democracy exclusively with any one type of national, governmental institution. Methodism can flourish in a form of national institutional life like that of the United States. It can also flourish in Canada, or Australia, or in England, or in France, or in Germany. We have pretty well got over the notion in these days that democracy means any one form of social institution. He would make rather a sorry spectacle of himself who would insist that the United States is a democracy and that Great Britain is not. Just as democracy has been able to flourish under all governmental forms of national existence, so Methodism has shown herself able to make adjustment to all types of nations. It will be remembered that Phillips Brooks, in speaking of Japan, declared

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it to be the duty of the Christian Church to take the Lord Jesus Christ to Japan and leave him there, permitting the Japanese to work Christian principles into their thought according to their own aptitudes and needs. The Methodist Church has almost literally followed the advice of Bishop Brooks in Japan. It may be regretted that in adjusting Japanese Methodism to world-wide Methodism the connection was not kept closer, but the Methodist aim at least was wise. The church no doubt in coming years will ask that the Chinese and Indian and African and Latin-American Methodists be as far as possible held as integral parts of a world-wide scheme. But there will be nothing in this scheme itself to forbid the working out of the Methodist spirit into different national and racial expressions. Without reflecting upon the nobility of missionaries from European lands to non-Christian nations, it may be permissible to remark that the missionary from America, especially from a church which comprises so many of what Abraham Lincoln used to call "plain people," is at something of an advantage in his approach to natives over missionaries from those nations which hold colonial possessions. No one could deny

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the vast sum of human welfare to be set down to the credit of some nations that have established colonies among backward peoples. But one of the disadvantages of colony-holding is that the citizen from the mother country, while he does not, indeed, consciously think of himself as superior to natives of subject lands, nevertheless really takes himself as superior. At the worst this manifests itself in haughtiness, and at the best in a sort of overfatherliness. The American is much more likely to approach the native of a non-Christian country upon a plane of real brotherliness than are citizens of colony-holding European nations. It is all very well for the missionary to look upon his native converts as children, but the ideal is that he is to look upon them as brothers. Moreover, it seems more likely that the American missionary will place himself in the position of a native non-Christian than will others. For this reason it is to be noticed that Americans are very likely to become altogether "pro" the people with whom they deal, and American boards very soon call home missionaries who do not thus take the point-of-view of the people with whom they work. All this, of course, is to the advantage of the missionary from the

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United States whether he be Methodist or not. But we mention the matter here simply because of the fact that Methodist missionaries so largely come out of the ordinary circumstances of the ordinary American home.

It must not be understood, however, from the above that Methodism can see its mission to non-Christian peoples fulfilled without an all around application of the gospel to the problems of non-Christian life. The attempt in preaching to such peoples is to make as many points of contact as possible. Hence the reliance upon medical, educational, social, and institutional agencies. But in all things there is both a universal and a particular element. Sterilization of surgical instruments is as absolute a necessity in a Chinese hospital as in an American hospital, but the aim is not to plant American hospitals all over China. The aim is to put universal principles of science in the hands of the Chinese, that they may make their own use of them. It is to be hoped that this process of introduction of western civilization will not be done in any such fashion as to level down or smooth out what is distinctively Chinese in the handling of Christianity. Missionary effort aims at the elimination of everything non-Christian, but

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not of what is distinctively Chinese or Japanese or Indian. The element of diversity is as important for Christianity as the element of uniformity. There is nothing in Methodism that necessarily works against the preservation of what is distinctive in racial tendency. The greatest leveler, after all, is human sin. Sin makes for uniformity as does nothing else. The aim of Methodism is to get rid of sin in order to give human beings a chance.

The criticism is sometimes passed upon Methodist missionary endeavor that the Methodists give too much of their time to the so-called lower classes. Some Roman Catholic critics especially have called attention to the fact that Methodist effort seems to be so completely directed toward the very lowest elements in the society of non-Christian lands. We are charged with ministering to people of such low moral tendencies that we make "rice Christians," for example. It may be that we have not been as successful as we should in reaching a more favored class of society in non-Christian lands, but we should not allow ourselves to become unduly disturbed at the criticism of our work among the classes worst off. There are, of course, those who insist

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that the correct strategy in Christian missionary effort is to try to reach first the most influential leaders in the alien lands, and through them reach downward through the masses. It is a little pathetic to see the delight of some missionary workers when they have made a convert of this or that native social leader in a non-Christian land, for we cannot resist a misgiving that the influence may not reach as far as the missionary hopes. Leadership in so-called heathen lands is not on so democratic a basis as to lend much ground for the belief that the true missionary method is from above downward. Of course no hard-and-fast rules can be laid down in affairs of this kind. But the more wholesome movement seems to be from beneath upward. According to the old illustration, the fire started from below sets the whole mass in a blaze more quickly than the fire laid on from the top.

CHAPTER IX

SOME OF THE INSTRUMENTS

WE have said repeatedly that the essentials of Methodism are just the strokes of emphasis on certain religious needs. Methodism has through the decades of its existence grown to be an enormous organization. There are those who are in danger of confusing this or that feature of the organization with the fundamental spiritual purpose of Methodism. It may be well, then, for us to look at some of the instruments which are to be used for the accomplishment of the spiritual purpose of Methodism.

THE ITINERANCY

One feature of Methodist machinery which some regard as especially sacred is the itinerancy. When Methodism first began its organized work the preachers were stationed in the various charges for a space of one year. After that the limit was raised to two years, then to three years, then to five, and finally was removed altogether. At each successive

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legislative change of the time limit there was protest that something sacredly Methodist had been tampered with. What is the essential aim in the Methodist itinerancy? Simply to have ease of movement enough to lead the denomination as a whole to the largest spiritual result. In the early days the life of the Methodist was very simple, and the preaching was confined to the announcement of a few great fundamentals. But modern society has become increasingly complex, and in this complexity churches in different localities come to have a distinctive mission calling for a distinctive order of talent in the ministry. In the old days of Asbury just one type of Methodist ministry would have been fairly satisfactory in any part of Methodism. But the times have changed, and specialized effort is required to meet the needs of special situations. The Methodist Church has sometimes been characterized as a rural church. But think of the difference in rural ministry now from what it was in the days of our fathers. In those days the "protracted meeting" was the only social event which broke in upon the tedium of the long winter. Everybody, converted and unconverted, would during the course of the winter be found at the meeting.

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But now, the newspaper reaches the farmer, the telephone runs out to his house, the roads are so much improved that it is easy for him to "get to town"—especially since automobiles have become so common in the rural districts—and the church is just one among other agencies striving to get the attention of the farmer. So that the alert country minister has to search for all possible points of contact with the people of the community. He cannot do this if he does not view country life from the point of view of a man who lives in the country. Successful preaching in any case comes only as the preacher brings himself to the angle of view of the people to whom he is preaching. If now the country minister is a little slow, he cannot come to know his community in one year; and if he is very quick in his mastery of the needs of the community, he ought not to be taken away at the end of one year. Of course if he is a failure in the country, he should be pulled out as quickly as possible.

The city problem likewise is one of tangled perplexity. In the old days the congregations, even in the cities like New York, were much more stable than at present. But with the growth of cheap transportation systems a

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man who is in the city to-day may be in the suburbs to-morrow, and vice versa. Changes are so rapid in our city churches that in the course of a half dozen years the minister who has remained that long is about the only fixed point in the flow. Methodist itinerancy has in many quarters passed over from the preacher to the congregation. Many wise observers insist that it takes ten years to become pastorally efficient in a large city church. This may seem extreme, but it is not really as extreme as it sounds. We would not have it understood, however, that we think that the sole aim of the Methodist itinerancy is to provide for a lengthened pastorate. One of its virtues is that it shortens some pastorates. Under the three-years system a preacher who ought to have gone at the end of two years stayed three because his official board would put up with him for another year rather than to hurt his feelings. Likewise under the five-year system, many a man stayed the full term who ought to have gone in three years. Of course the adoption of the new plan has made for restlessness in many parts of our denomination, but the restlessness is in many cases justified. Many Conferences have sinned against the church in taking into the

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ministry men with whom the ordinary church would become restless before one year had passed. On the whole, however, the Methodist itinerancy is serving well its original purpose of being merely an instrument for such handling of men as will produce the best religious result.

THE EPISCOPACY

A further instrumental factor in Methodism, so important indeed that it finds its way into the name of the church, is the episcopacy. Here again we must remember that we are dealing merely with an instrument. The church has from the beginning stood against the idea of episcopacy as anything sacred in itself. To use the technical phrase, the episcopacy is not a separate order. It is to be judged just as other instruments are judged, by its efficiency in performing the work for which it is intended. The sole question which may be asked of the office is as to whether it fits in harmoniously and effectively to an institution whose aim is wholly religious. Does the episcopacy aid in the conversion of men? Does it help in the spiritual upbuilding of men? Is it calculated to assist in the movement that captures the whole of human life

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for the kingdom of God? Does it give the spiritual interests the right of way? These are the fundamental questions in dealing with the bishopric.

The church is at liberty at any General Conference to inaugurate such changes in the episcopal scheme as seem likely to further religious interests. In these present days the tendency is clearly toward making the episcopacy a more responsive and forceful servant of democracy. It is the merest commonplace to say that the democratic movement of our time works its way out in expression in church practice if not in church organization. The democratic movement has always thriven best in Christian atmosphere, and makes in turn for large religious opportunity. Its emphasis on human value is essentially Christian. The episcopacy must more and more be squared into meeting the demands of a worthy democracy.

As we look through the history of the church we see the movement away from the autocratic idea of the episcopacy. Somebody once went to John Wesley with the complaint that the Methodist system was a despotism. "If you mean by 'despotism,'" replied Wesley, "that the power is lodged in the hands of one

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man, the Methodist movement is despotism, but I see no harm in it so long as I am the man." Many another high official since Wesley's time has quite possibly experienced the same feeling. Historically, there has been justification for the despotism. The common saying is that bishops existed before there was a General Conference. But bishops were necessary before a General Conference was possible. Conditions in America were primitive, and the bishop was really the only church official who had a chance to know the whole field. In the nature of the case the pioneer system was autocratic, and in the human nature of the case the bishops were very likely to manifest autocracy in their bearing. With the growth of the church, however, matters rapidly began to change, by the introduction of extra-disciplinary agencies, which, though not formally recognized, nevertheless became exceedingly potent. For example, the so-called "Cabinet" of presiding elders or district superintendents has been in active operation for decades, but has never until within the past quadrennium received the slightest mention in a Book of Discipline. So with the Committee on Pulpit Supply. The General Conference of 1912 formally reaffirmed its

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position that direct dealings between ministers and church committees are unmethodistic, but the practice has gone on for generations. Theoretically, a bishop would have power to go to the seat of an Annual Conference and make all the appointments himself without consulting district superintendents, ministers, or churches. Practically, if he gave himself to such procedure, he might just as well hand in his resignation at the next General Conference. The church has advanced from the idea of an autocratic episcopacy to the idea of a bishop as an arbiter of all interests involved. It is a bishop's business in making appointments to hear all parties from which any light can possibly come, and then to make the decision.) Of course there is protest at once against the word "arbiter" as suggesting a mere umpire. A bishop is supposed to be more of a manager or a general. But managers and generals have more power in creating, or at least in choosing the material with which they work, than do Methodist bishops. The Annual Conference, and not the bishop, determines who shall enter the ministry. The bishop has to deal with the men after they are admitted. Nor can the bishop's power of removal extend to outright dismissal. If he

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removes a man who is failing in one position, that can only mean that he is to give him a chance to wreck some other position, for which the bishop in the end will likely get the blame. There is, indeed, a measure of force in the protest against the word "arbiter." It is the business of the bishop to do what he can to get the right men into the right places, even though he himself cannot officially say anything as to the men taken into the ministry. Outside of his official relationships, to be sure, the bishop can have whatever measure of influence his character and abilities win for him. He cannot make any authoritative pronouncements, however, except in minor points of law when he is actually holding a conference; he cannot say anything that will "go" simply because a bishop says it. His utterance must meet the same kind of criticism that any discussion must meet. A few years ago action against the supposed heretical views of a certain Methodist theological professor was begun on the assumption that the bishops were in some way the guardians of the Methodist faith. The bishops were called upon from various quarters to take action against the supposed false teachings. It must be said to the credit of the bishops that they them-

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selves protested in this case that they were not supposed to pass on matters of doctrine, and the ensuing General Conference definitely relieved bishops of all responsibility of investigating doctrinal soundness. The office is a purely administrative one. A bishop can preach, or write, or counsel as he pleases, but in such activities he is simply a Methodist preacher. The desire that the bishops should be the leaders of the church means only that strong men should be put into the episcopacy, but nobody expects their leading to be the leading of authority. It is, rather, to be the leading of influence.

But, after all, can an episcopal system be democratic? Why not? Democracy in our time is moving more and more toward centering executive power in single heads, and then holding those heads responsible. Suppose, for example, we could have two hundred and fifty bishops instead of twenty-five. On the face of it, such a crowd might look democratic. But democracy means the expression of the will of the whole people. Two hundred and fifty officials would mean large opportunity for divided responsibility. Just as in municipal government we are fast moving away from the idea of large councils to

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four or five commissioners, so in the church we are insisting that power shall be so localized that we can tell who is responsible. Methodist episcopacy can, within certain limits, be thoroughly fitted to the demands of advancing democratic spirit. Democracy does not mean a large number of officials, except as these are experts appointed by an administrator. It does not mean a fixed term of service, such as election for a period of years. In fact such term-service makes possible in many cases the thwarting of the popular will. It does mean that a man is to be put in position and kept there as long as his service expresses reasonably well the growing life of the community back of him.

But this means the recall. Certainly, and why not? Here is an organism of over two million people. Suppose a bishop is clearly out of touch with the ideals of that vast organism. Suppose the ideals of his appointment-making are a hindrance rather than a help to the extension of the kingdom of God. There is no reason for retaining such a man in office.

THE DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENCY

The district superintendency, or the presid-

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ing eldership, as it was formerly called, has always been one of the distinctive features of the Methodist scheme. Of recent years this supervisional feature has been the object of a good deal of rather stormy criticism. The sources of the criticism are somewhat various. Among the most forceful are the unwillingness of preachers and churches to have anyone in close supervision over them, the inability of the church that is progressing fairly well of itself to realize the need of a district superintendent, and the fact that in too many instances men have been placed in the superintendency for whom places could not easily be found elsewhere. In spite of the criticism, however, no feature of Methodist economy is capable of greater effectiveness for good. Take the country church problem, for example. The writer is acquainted with rural districts in the Central West where in a single county three or four churches of denominations other than Methodist would be without pastors during the greater part of the year, the difficulty being that the pastoral supply committee of the local church had not the means for securing ministers willing to work in a hard field at a low salary. For this reason denominations other than Methodist are

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in many parts of the country providing home missionary secretaries, or secretaries for Sabbath school work whose function is partly that of the Methodist district superintendent. With his wide acquaintance among ministers the Methodist superintendent can prevail upon a young minister to stay in a hard field with the hope of being given a larger opportunity if he succeeds; and when one minister goes, it is the business of the superintendent to find another. So with industrial communities where there is rapid change of population and with centers of foreign-speaking peoples who need to have brought to them resources from outside. Of course it is easy to see that an independent congregation, needing no particular help from a district superintendent, may wonder what the superintendent is for, but this wonder comes out of rather a narrow range of vision. In this field, as in so many others, everything depends on the choice of the superintendent. If the writer were to try to pick out from Methodist history of the past ten years a half dozen most notable achievements, almost all of them would be achievements of district superintendents. It is to be regretted that the district superintendent still labors under the disadvantage of the time

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limit. A good district superintendent ought not necessarily to be cut off at the end of six years, and a poor one ought not to be encouraged in the belief that he is entitled to remain six years. The removal of the time limit would probably shorten the term of the superintendency in large numbers of cases. But the fact that these large numbers ought not really to serve six years is no reason why a man who can serve longer than six years should not be given the opportunity.

PROJECTS FOR UNION

Just at present plans for union of various denominations are occupying a great deal of the thought of the religious world. There is nothing in the Methodist system which would forbid the adoption of any scheme of union that might seem to promise success for the development of spiritual efficiency. In all such plans we must remember that there are some functions which churches can perform best separately, and some others which they can perform best together. Union reached at the cost of the loss of what is distinctive in each denomination would not be desirable; and, of course, a separateness which prevents effective and economical management is like-

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wise undesirable. Of the two definite projects before religious leaders, in some instances federation would seem to be the best aim, and in other instances organic union should be sought for. To take an illustration from the realm of international movements, the most successful imperial advances seem to-day to come by a process of federation. It is impossible to bring into uniformity of national procedure peoples living all round the globe. Great Britain seems to have succeeded in building up an empire loyal to herself while leaving the scattered units the largest possible measure of local self-government. So far as the Church of Christ as a whole is concerned, the most helpful program for some distance into the future seems to be federation. Until various church bodies are so much alike as to be practically the same type, organic union would not seem to be advisable. Let us take the case of two nations as analogy. The first step is the development of each nation to a distinct sense of its own nationality. Then social progress and industrial organization should proceed so far along similar lines that in their essential conceptions of citizenship the nations should approximate pretty closely to the same type. After that

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they might think of merging together in organic union. Federation is, of course, possible when the different types of life are more diverse. It would be perfectly feasible to bring the United States and the Latin-American states into federation; it could hardly be possible for many decades to bring them into organic union.

This general observation may throw light upon the projects for union between the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Mere federation between two such bodies does not seem to go far enough. Moreover, such approaches to federation as we have already tried have not been oversuccessful. In the two branches the fundamental accents in religious experience are substantially the same. It seems that some plan should be devised that would make possible the union of the two bodies. Of course one stumbling-block is the element of Negro membership in the church, and yet there does not seem to be anything even in this problem that a downright devotion to the kingdom of God would not be able to overcome. If the Negro question can be solved, the mere adjustments of the machinery ought not to prove insuperable difficulties. It will help us all in

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our discussions, however, to remind ourselves always that the primary aim of Methodism is to lead men from darkness to light, to build them up in Christian faith, to seize life at the earliest possible moment for the Kingdom, and to hold for the religious interests the right of way.



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